Plain English Summary

Treatments for rheumatoid arthritis that has not improved with previous treatment

What does the guidance say?

Baricitinib and tofacitinib are recommended for listing on the Medication Assistance Fund (MAF) for government subsidy for adults with moderately to severely active rheumatoid arthritis.

Rituximab biosimilar (Truxima) is recommended for listing on the Standard Drug List (SDL) for government subsidy for adults with severely active rheumatoid arthritis.

Tocilizumab and rituximab reference biologic (MabThera) are not recommended for subsidy for rheumatoid arthritis.

What is rheumatoid arthritis?

Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune condition where the immune system mistakenly attacks the body's healthy tissues, causing pain, swelling and inflammation in joints. It often affects smaller joints in your fingers and toes first and may spread to other joints as the condition worsens. Overtime, the joints can become damaged and stop working properly. People with moderately to severely active rheumatoid arthritis have a high level of joint inflammation and pain, which affects their ability to carry out everyday tasks.

What are baricitinib and tofacitinib?

Baricitinib and tofacitinib are oral drugs that belong to a group of medicines called Janus kinase (JAK) inhibitors, which can relieve pain, stiffness and swelling in your joints and slow down joint damage caused by rheumatoid arthritis.

What is Truxima?

Truxima is a biosimilar of a biologic drug called rituximab. It is given as a slow drip in your vein (intravenously) to reduce inflammation and relieve symptoms of severe rheumatoid arthritis.

Biologics are medicines that contain active ingredients extracted from living organisms. Biosimilars are also biologics. They are highly similar, but not identical to, their reference biologics (i.e., the first biologic developed). Biosimilars have similar effectiveness, safety and quality records compared to their reference biologics and are used to treat the same diseases.

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Who can have baricitinib, tofacitinib and Truxima?

Adults can have baricitinib, tofacitinib or Truxima if they have moderately to severely active rheumatoid arthritis that has not improved with previous treatment. Your doctor can advise if one of these treatments is suitable for you.

Why were these treatments recommended for subsidy?

ACE evaluates how well a treatment works in relation to how much it costs compared to other treatments. Baricitinib, tofacitinib and Truxima were recommended because their benefits in relieving symptoms for certain patients with rheumatoid arthritis justifies their costs.

Tocilizumab and MabThera were not recommended for subsidy because their benefits do not justify their costs.

What does listing on SDL or MAF mean for me?

Truxima has been listed on the Standard Drug List (SDL). Drugs on the SDL are subsidised at 50% for all Singaporean citizens who are treated in a public healthcare institution. Patients from lower to middle income households may received a higher subsidy of up to 75%.

Baricitinib and tofacitinib have been listed on the Medication Assistance Fund (MAF). The MAF helps people pay for expensive treatments that are clinically necessary. If your doctor prescribes baricitinib or tofacitinib for you, and you meet the MAF criteria, your treatment cost will be subsidised by 40% to 75%.

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